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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY & PUBLIC HEALTH**

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PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

TO: New Hampshire Early Care and Education Programs

FROM: Jose T. Montero, MD, MPH, Chief of Communicable Disease Control

DATE: December 12, 2003`

SUBJECT: Recommendations for the prevention and control of influenza and other respiratory illness outbreaks in early care and education programs

Epidemics of influenza occur nearly every winter and cause an average of approximately 36,000 deaths annually in the United States. Rates of serious illness and death from influenza are highest among persons aged ≥ 65 years and persons of any age who have medical conditions that place them at high risk for complications from influenza. The spread is rapid through a community with widespread absenteeism from work and school. Young children typically have milder disease although may have a higher fever. In young children, croup and bronchitis may occur due to infection with the influenza virus.

Flu may be unpredictable. It is not uncommon for seasons to be quite different in their timing. We still do not know how this season will progress. It is too early to tell if the high level of activity that some parts of the country are experiencing will continue throughout the flu season, or what the impact will be on the citizens of NH.

The prevention and control of influenza and other seasonal respiratory illness outbreaks pose an important challenge faced by all early care and education programs. This advisory gives background information on influenza and practical recommendations for the prevention and control of influenza and other respiratory illness outbreaks in the early care and education programs.

Prevention of Influenza

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have observed, nationwide, an earlier onset of the flu this year. In New Hampshire the influenza season is within historical limits; we continue to encourage individuals at high risk for complications from influenza and health care workers, as described in the attached fact sheet, to receive a flu vaccination, while supplies remain available.

For healthy persons ages 5 to 49 years, the new nasal flu vaccine, Flu-mist, is another option to prevent flu.

Recommendations for controlling influenza and other respiratory illness outbreaks in early care and education programs:

Since the appropriate treatment of patients with viral or bacterial respiratory illness depends on accurate and prompt diagnosis, encourage parents and staff to look for changes in behavior or appearance that may indicate a change in a child's health. Does the child act or look differently from usual? Encourage staff to discuss any symptoms of concern they have with the child's parents and encourage parents to contact the child's health care provider to get a diagnosis, confirmed with laboratory testing when appropriate.

Early Care and Education Program recommendations

- Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of illness or disease at home or in a childcare setting. Review proper hand washing technique with staff and children. Adults and children should wash their hands especially:
 - ✓ Upon arrival.
 - ✓ If moving from one childcare group to another.
 - ✓ Before and after food preparation, handling, or serving.
 - ✓ Before and after eating meals or snacks.
 - ✓ Before and after giving medications.
 - ✓ Before and after playing in water that more than one person is using.
 - ✓ After toileting or changing diapers.
 - ✓ After assisting a child with toilet use.
 - ✓ After handling pets or other animals
 - ✓ After contamination with body fluids (e.g. blood, saliva, urine, mucous from the nose).
- Display DHHS hand washing posters. This poster can be downloaded from the Department's website: at www.dhhs.state.nh.us.
- Maximize facility ventilation by opening windows as appropriate
- Make sure there's enough wipes or Kleenex for children's noses, and make sure they're thrown away promptly.

- Consider sending educational materials, such as the attached Flu Fact Sheet, home with the children in your program

Staff-specific recommendations

- Ill staff should be sent home and should remain home until at least 48 hours after symptoms resolve
- Staff sent home should not “moonlight” at other jobs during their illness
- Because influenza and in general any respiratory illness outbreak often cause administrative challenges due to staff illness and absenteeism, it can be useful to make plans ahead of time for how to deal with staffing shortages

Child-specific recommendations

- Children with cough and an fever above 100, measured under the arm, or oral fever above 101 F. should be restricted from attending the early care and education program
- Children and staff should cover their mouths while coughing
- Make sure that children use wipes or Kleenex when coughing or blowing their nose, and then thrown them away promptly

The NH Bureau of Communicable Disease Control staff is always available for consultation and assistance in controlling influenza and any other respiratory illness outbreaks. Please report any increase in cases of respiratory or influenza-like illness; our staff will help you to develop tailored control measures for your facility. During regular business hours, they can be reached at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345, ext. 4496. After hours or on weekends, please call the state switchboard at 800-852-3345 and request the Public Health Nurse on call.

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention and control of influenza: recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). *MMWR* 1999 Apr 30; 48(RR-4): 1-28

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National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out of Home Child Care Programs, Caring for Our Children. 2002, 2nd ed., American Academy of Pediatrics; American Public Health Association; National Resource for Health and Safety in Child Care

Model Child Care Health Policies. 2002, 4th ed., The Early Childhood Education Linkage System (Excels) Rosemont, PA: Healthy Child Care Pennsylvania